



CITY OF RICHMOND

PLANNING COMMISSION

November 20, 2012

To the Honorable Council of the  
City of Richmond, Virginia

At its meeting of November 19, 2012, the Planning Commission voted (9-0) to **CONDITIONALLY APPROVE** the following:

**Location, Character and Extent:**

**Final Review of Main Street Station Site Plan at 1500 East Main Street. Council District 7**

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This proposal involves improvements to the parcels containing and adjacent to Main Street Station associated with the rehabilitation of Main Street Station's train shed to serve as the State and City's premier Welcome and Travel Center as well as the region's multimodal transportation center. The subject properties are located east of N. 15<sup>th</sup> Street and North of E. Main Street adjacent to Main Street Station and are all located in the M-1 (Light Industrial) zoning district. Much of the subject area is shadowed by the elevated Interstate 95.

In addition to Main Street Station, the subject properties are currently improved with a surface parking lot containing 106 spaces and serving cars and light trucks. There is no safe separation of pedestrian and vehicular movements through the lot, there are no amenities to make the area more inviting, and there is no landscaping. The parking area also lacks the capacity to serve multiple modes of transportation including bicycle, electric vehicles, trolley pick-up and drop off, taxi queuing, shuttles, motor coaches and effective passenger drop-off and waiting areas.

The proposed plan formalizes the parking area south of Franklin Street and includes an arrival plaza so that those entering the Main Street Station head house from the west parking lot are greeted with seating areas and exhibit space that can accommodate displays, artwork and informational kiosks. The proposal is to provide two entrances from Franklin Street leading to a better defined parking area with 48 spaces containing curbs, islands, and brick pedestrian pathways from the parking area to the plaza. The proposal also includes a pull-in area for passenger pick up/drop off adjacent to Main Street Station, and another pull-in area north of Franklin Street for buses, shuttles, and taxis.

At the north side of the parking area, the proposal includes a bricked area where motor coaches, trolley buses, or hotel shuttles could pick up/drop off visitors. A small hardscaped area between the pick up/drop off and Franklin Street would contain bike racks as well as an area of trees with benches underneath. The plans call for the benches to be lit from beneath and for the trees to be lit from beneath as well. In addition, the parking area would contain lighting and trash cans.

The area between the parking area and 15<sup>th</sup> Street will be landscaped with either ornamental grass or shrubs, with a portion of the area being set aside to hold ice tanks. The ice tanks are proposed to be used as part of the heating, ventilation and cooling (HVAC) system for the train shed, whereby ice made during off-peak hours is used to cool the building during peak electricity usage hours. Renovation of the train shed will also require new HVAC equipment, which is proposed to be located adjacent to the north side of the existing mechanical enclosure near the corner of E. Main and 15<sup>th</sup> Streets. The existing fenced enclosure will be expanded, with matching materials, to enclose the new equipment. In the conceptual phase, this equipment was proposed to be located on the western side of the existing enclosure, mostly because the designers were

informed that the equipment must be as clear of the overhead interstate as possible. In the time since, it has been determined by engineers that this is not the case. Privets will be used to soften the western side of the existing mechanical enclosure, and to screen the proposed extension of fencing.

There have been improvements to 15<sup>th</sup> Street in recent years, including installation of street trees, provision of new sidewalk and construction of a gateway banner. The brick sidewalk installed on 15<sup>th</sup> Street turns the corner to Franklin Street and transitions to concrete near the I-95 overpass. This proposal includes providing new brick sidewalk along both sides of Franklin Street from Main Street Station westward until it meets the existing brick sidewalk. The brick sidewalks will be laid in a herringbone pattern to match the existing. These sidewalks will also contain pedestrian-scaled street lighting to match those installed on 15<sup>th</sup> Street south of Franklin Street.

The portion of the train shed north of Franklin Street is proposed to be the location of one or more commercial establishments. There will be an at-grade entrance to this portion of the train shed, which currently contains a non-historic cinder-block addition that will be demolished. The proposal for this entry plaza, which may be altered in the future to suit the tenant's wishes, is for a cobblestone plaza containing trees and seating areas, lighted in the same fashion as the proposed plaza to the west of the train station.

At-grade north of the train shed and in between the elevated train tracks will be train cars on rails, designed to hold the backup water supply for the deluge sprinkler system in the train shed. The glass walls of the train shed must be protected from a potential rail car fire and must be sprinkled. The quantity of water that must be available to extinguish a rail car for an hour's duration must be stored on site as it is beyond the utility supply available in Shockoe Bottom. In lieu of underground storage the designers propose to use train tank cars to act as water storage and become part of the train landscape at the station. The proposal includes four tank cars and the reuse of the existing box car presently on site, which will house the pump for the sprinkler system. The box car and tank cars will be freshly painted or could otherwise be a promotional opportunity for a site tenant or public art.

Currently, the portion of Franklin Street east of the Interstate is not an established street but rather is a driveway, a hold-over from the days when the train shed was used for an indoor mall. Through this project, Franklin Street will be reestablished as right-of-way through the site and as public passage through the train shed for bicycles and pedestrians. The plans call for Franklin Street to be composed of granite cobblestones. It is unclear at this time whether or not there are existing cobbles underneath of the asphalt. Heading east on Franklin Street, there would be bollards set at the curb line to ensure that vehicles do not enter. The street would then travel under the train shed, with canopies over the entrances on both ends.

There is an approximate 6' change in grade from the high point on the western side of the train shed to the low point on the eastern side, so the portion of the street under the train shed would contain both a ramp in the center with stairways on either side to allow both bicycle and pedestrian travel. There will be two entrances to the train shed along this section of Franklin Street, as indicated in the plans. A ramp on the eastern side of the train shed will bring the street back to the grade of Ambler Street, where bollards will be located. On the east side of Main Street Station, the plans call for a potential bicycle rental area, hardscaped with brick and containing bike racks. A brick sidewalk along Ambler Street will connect this area to the north end of the train shed.

Immediately adjacent to Main Street Station on both the eastern and western sides, the area under the train trestles is currently covered with stone. The proposed plan intends to soften the landscape with a hardy ground cover in place of much of the stone on site, while retaining a section of stone abutting the station.

The Federal [Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act](#) (ISTEA) created a funding mechanism for advancing multimodalism in the United States. In 1991, the City applied for an ISTEA grant to study the development of a multimodal transportation center for the City, with Main Street Station ultimately selected. Since 1991, the City has successfully obtained over \$65 million in grant funding from predominantly federal and state sources for the acquisition of the buildings and surrounding property, restoration of the headhouse, and construction of the Plaza at Main Street Station. These funds will also cover the future rehabilitation of the train shed and improvements to the site to better accommodate passenger drop-off, vehicular circulation, passenger loading and alighting and improvements to the entrance to the site from Franklin and 15<sup>th</sup> Streets on the west side of the facility.

The subject properties are located in the Shockoe Focus Area, as defined by the 2008 Downtown Master Plan, with the majority of the parcels designated as being in the Urban Center Area, while Main Street Station is designated as being in the Civic Area. The Urban Center Area is characterized by “higher density, mixed-use development, typically arranged on a fine-grained street network, with wide sidewalks, regular tree planting, and minimal setbacks” (page 3.25). The Civic Area refers to “public sites dedicated for publicly used buildings dedicated to culture, government, and public gatherings” (page 3.28).

The Transportation chapter of the Plan recommends that Main Street Station be restored as an inter-modal center. One of the specific recommendations is that “any development plan for the property should include a new street through the two-block long train shed, in order to increase connectivity in the area and enhance pedestrian access” (page 5.24). The Plan further states that “an important component of the future of Main Street Station is to consider it for a multi-modal transportation hub for Downtown. A multi-modal hub could include increased passenger rail service, commuter rail service, light rail or streetcar buses, bus rapid transit, shuttles, taxis, and bicycle/pedestrian facilities” (page 5.24).

The Urban Design Committee finds that the final proposal is thoughtfully considered and along with the proposed renovations to the train shed, considered as a separate application, will provide an exciting next step towards the realization of Main Street Station as a multi-modal hub, and will present an attractive welcome to the City and Main Street Station to future visitors. The Committee further finds that the proposed improvements are consistent with the recommendations of both the Urban Design Guidelines and the Downtown Master Plan. During conceptual review the Committee expressed some concern about the location of new HVAC equipment and its impact on the streetscape in the area of the intersection of E. Main and 15<sup>th</sup> Streets. The Committee finds that the relocation of the new HVAC equipment to the north side of the existing mechanical enclosure, and the provision of landscaping to screen both the enclosure and the new equipment, is an improvement upon the previous design.

At its meeting on November 19, 2012, the Commission concurred with the Urban Design Committee's findings and voted (9-0) to approve the proposed site improvements around Main Street Station with the following conditions recommended by the Urban Design Committee:

- That all new street lights match those already installed on N. 15<sup>th</sup> Street.
- That the applicant presents to the UDC details of the proposed site furniture, including but not limited to lighting interior to the parking lot, trash cans, benches, bollards and bike racks, if the racks are different than the City standard bike rack that has already been approved by the UDC.
- That the applicant presents to the UDC details on the proposed canopies at each side of the Franklin Street entrances through the train shed.

Very Truly Yours,



Lory Markham  
Secretary, City Planning Commission

Cc: Jeff Eastman, Secretary to the Urban Design Committee  
Jeannie Welliver, Department of Economic and Community Development